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ABSTRACT

By the year 2000 there will be three Americas as the rich get richer, the poor become more destitute, and the self-sufficient become more complacent. By that date computer technology will dominate every facet of social and personal life. Asian Americans, because of their good placement as technicians, will be found in every segment of the technological society. By then the center of technological development will be Japan and, as collectively the Asian nations emerge as the dominant trade partner of the United States, America will have to adjust to Asian ways of doing business. Therefore, in addition to developing technical competence in their students, teachers need to impart cultural sensitivity to the nations in Asia and the Asians in the United States. It is essential that the resources be found for bilingual development and for the development of the "sociological imagination." Children from heterogeneous backgrounds studying and playing together will be the primary sources for developing cultural sensitivity and an appreciation for cultural diversity. Among grown-ups the task of raising consciousness in cultural sensitivity will rest primarily on minority groups who will need, in workplaces and neighborhoods, to impart to the dominant groups their oneness and diversity. For the nation as a whole, we must temper the present Europe-oriented, individualistic, competitive curriculum with a touch of Asian communal and cooperative spirit. (RDN)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
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EDUCATING ASIAN AMERICANS FOR THE YEAR 2000*

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Asian Americans are the Success Story

In the fields of science and mathematics, Asian Americans are the success story¹. They are disproportionately represented in higher education, both as students and faculty members in physical sciences. They are disproportionately engaged in research institutes and hi-tech laboratories across America. With the support of their families, they compensate for their relatively underdeveloped verbal skills with a concentration on studies that require mastery of symbolic logics rather than linguistic fluency². In the pursuit of academic excellence and the acquisition of technical skills, Asian Americans, on the whole, surpass the dominant group in America. They are highly competitive in this technological society.

While the documentation of the accomplishments of Asian Americans in science and mathematics is available (from diverse sources), the purpose of this presentation is not to highlight the apparent success of a particular minority group. The term "Asian Americans" is actually quite misleading. It masks the vast differences that exist among the groups subsumed under it. The Chinese in America are different from the Japanese, and they are both different from the Koreans, the Pilipinos, and the more recent immigrants from Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. A recital of the countries of origin of these groups tells of their different histories in this country. When we speak of the successful Asian Americans, we speak primarily of those who have settled in this land for two or

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more generations or those who were already successful in their home countries prior to their migration to the U.S. They have the resources to acquire technical skills.

Regardless of their differences, Asian Americans do share a belief in the power of education. The older generation would make all efforts to ensure that the younger generation is a success, to make a name for themselves. The younger generation is impressed from childhood that they are to bring honor to their ancestors. Thus, a cultural conditioning is at work, predisposing Asian American children to the quest for academic excellence.

However, not all Asian Americans are successful in or adapt at the pursuit of mathematics or science. Some of us just do not have the aptitude for these disciplines. Others are not taught how to observe or how to reason.

Retrospection

How do we educate Asian Americans for the year 2000? What kind of society do we expect? What kind of technology will we find? Actually, the year 2000 is not that far away; we have to pass through only 15 more years. If we reverse ourselves for retrospection rather than projection, we find ourselves beginning with the year 1970. In the interim of 15 years, we passed through a worldwide oil crisis, several generations of computers, the successful development of the "miracle rice," the multi-dimensional advancement of medical and space technology, and a series of military operations. The space shuttle is perhaps the

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best encapsulation of the scientific and technical achievements of the past 15 years.

Important were these achievements, but they were only one segment of our societal development. In the interim of the past 15 years, we also witnessed the rise and decline of public and private commitment to civil rights; we participated directly or indirectly in the erosion of all forms of morality; we regressed from the ideal of "Ask what you can do for your country" to the creed of "What's in it for me"; we confused might with right, form with substance. In the name of conservatism, we squandered the national heritage of fairness and decency, and we refused to live in a real world. Double talk became the principal currency in public service.

The sojourn into the recent past is to suggest that in the next 15 years, barring thermonuclear holocaust, we do not expect America to be different from the immediate past 15 years. We will find, however, three Americas crystallized in the year 2000; the rich will get richer, the poor will become destitute, and the self-sufficient will become more complacent.

Three Americas

The rich America, made up of arms dealers, food processing conglomerates, transportation barons, hi-tech entrepreneurs, and those who made their bundles through exploiting the national deficit, will remain relatively small in size, white, masculine, and possessed: possessed by its incessant quest for pleasure of the senses and its continuing fear of losing everything.

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The poor America, with its displaced unemployed, the elderly, the refugees from countries we tried to save for democracy, and the masses from rural and small-town America whose farms and businesses were foreclosed in the interest of national security, will increase in size. Its composition will include people of all races.

The self-sufficient America will be the amoral majority. They will be busy coping and have no time for common welfare. They will race forward frenetically just to stay where they have been for several decades. They will be strong in profession, weak in action. When they act, they will get into each other's way. Most Asian Americans will be in this America of self-sufficiency.

The three Americas are not a pleasant sketch, but they are the ones that will interact with emerging technologies, receiving unequal rewards from the interaction. The rich will be able to exploit the emerging technologies, the self-sufficient will be driven by the new technologies, and the poor will be pushed further into the periphery of the society. As a result of their relatively good placement as technicians, Asian Americans will be found in every segment of the technological society.

All Things are Possible

Taking the past 15 years as prelude, we expect total dominance of computer technology in every facet of social and personal life, from conception to expiration, by the year 2000³. Biotechnology will affect every aspect of plant

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and animal production and protection. Genetic engineering and organ transplant will become routine activities. Laser technology will have transformed the construction and automobile industries. Communication and observation satellites will be as numerous as national monuments. Those who could afford it would find life pleasant and easy, with all forms of electronics at their disposal. By the year 2000, whatever is thinkable will be doable. In all these scientific and technical activities, Asian Americans will be present, continuing their present trend of development, without special support from America.

In the year 2000, the center of technological development will neither be America nor Europe; it will be Japan, the economic colossus of the late 20th Century. Since the end of Second World War, Japan had directed its national energies into life-supporting technological research and development. By early 1980's, it has attained economic dominance throughout Asia and achieved worldwide recognition for its preeminence in applied technology. While we assemble in Chicago for this annual meeting of AERA, Japan is hosting an international science and technology exposition in Tsukuba with the theme "Dwellings and Surroundings - science and technology for man at home." Forty-nine nations and 37 international organizations are participants of this science fair. Tsukuba, in fact, is a science city with 46 research institutes.

With Japan's cooperation and support, other Asian nations in the Pacific Basin will have also emerged as centers for specialized technology. The preoccupation with ideologies will have been superceded by the urgency in economic development. Their posture will no longer be an insistence on the

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correctness of an ideology but rather "seeking truth from practice." The classic guideline will be that first enunciated by the Chinese, that whether a cat is gray or white is of no consequence; the important thing is whether it catches mice. Collectively, the Asian nations will have emerged as the dominant trade partner of the U.S., continuing a trend begun in the early 1980's⁴. To maintain its share of international trade with Asia, America will have to adjust to the Asian ways of doing business.

Need for Cultural Awareness

Juxtapositioning the "three Americas" with the emerging techno-centers in Asia is to highlight that as far as Asian Americans are concerned - which is also to say that as far as the self sufficient America is concerned - educating for technical competence is not a serious problem. The existing educational curriculum and structure can cope with the dissemination of technical information. They are prepared, by whatever means, will benefit. What puts a tremendous strain on the existing educational systems is the requirement that, in addition to developing technical competence in their students, teachers are to impart to their charges a cultural sensitivity to the nations in Asia and the Asians in our Nation, and to the diversity within our Nation.

Despite their emergence as techno-centers and therefore sharing in a techno-culture of rationality, efficiency and productivity, the Asian nations will continue to be different from one another in their traditions and heritages, natural and human resources. What might be culturally acceptable to Indonesia will not necessarily be acceptable in Japan or China. What are

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culturally important to Malays will not necessarily be of similar significance to Koreans. Both in terms of technology transfer from Asia to the U.S. and trade with Asian nations, Americans of the dominant group need to develop cultural sensitivity on Asia.

Asian Americans, the only people on earth whose foreparents were incinerated by thermonuclear devices, need to hone their own cultural sensitivity to ensure that technologies will not evolve into a life-negating enterprise. To prepare for the year 2000, it is not enough to excel only in technology; the curriculum must incorporate social ethics, based on the understanding that regardless of how diverse we are in our cultures, we are inseparably connected to one another.

Thus, the critical question is not how we educate Asian Americans for the year 2000 in the context of emerging technologies, but how we carry out the task of educating the next generations and how we prepare ourselves for the year 2000.

As a start, we need to enable students to develop bilingual skills to facilitate communication with people from other nations and in this Nation, and to correct the implicit arrogance of monolingualism (that other people have to learn English in order to communicate with us). We need to cultivate in ourselves and in our students what C. Wright Mills spoke of as "the sociological imagination," the ability to relate our personal experiences to the wider context of social life, the ability to extract from seemingly different

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life situations the bond that makes for community building.

The problem is, if we do not have the resources to develop competence in science and mathematics and the basic skills of reading and writing, where will we find the resources for bilingual development or the development of "sociological imagination"?

In the development of cultural sensitivity among children, the answer is in our classroom where children of different races and socio-economic background studying and playing together. Instead of viewing the mix as a problem in instruction, we need to use the life situation as the content for teaching. We need to expend our energies in teaching learning skills rather than merely imparting facts. We need to ensure that our "facts" are cosmopolitan and not ethno-centric. Children from heterogeneous backgrounds will be the primary sources for developing cultural sensitivity. With the appreciation for cultural diversity established in childhood, the next generation of managers and technocrats will likely have more understanding for and be more accepting of people from other cultures.

For grown-ups, the task of raising consciousness in cultural sensitivity will rest primarily on minority groups. In our workplaces and our neighborhood, Asian Americans will need to impart to the dominant group their oneness and diversity. Among themselves, they will have to recognize that they are both Asian and American.

The quality of education we need, as we interact with Asian Americans, in

preparation for the year 2000 - when technology will dominate every aspect of life - is not merely the knowledge and skills for harnessing and using technology, but the complementary understanding of the different Asian and American mores and folkways. While grounding in mathematics and science is important for active participation in the shaping of technology, we need to move beyond technical information to instill in our students the capability of asking the "Why" questions. The next generations of managers and technocrats must develop a worldview in which technology is not an end in itself, but only a mean to an end. We need to temper the present day Europe-oriented, individualistic, competitive curriculum with a touch of Asian communal and cooperative spirit. Technologies at our disposal are to be employed to bridge the gaps among groups in America and across the Pacific Ocean.

*This paper is a contribution to the Symposium on Society, Technology and Minority Education, at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 1985, Professor Beverly M. Gordon, organizer. Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author; they do not represent the position of the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the Office of International Cooperation and Development.

Notes

¹ In a recent College Board report (in Asian Week, January 18, 1985), Asian Americans continue to achieve the highest average score in mathematics in the Scholastic Aptitude test but are lagging in verbal and written skills. In 1984, the average mathematics score for Asian Americans was 519, in contrast to the national average of 471. For verbal and written skills, the average Asian American score was 398 and the average national score was 426.

² see Samuel S. Peng, "Enrollment Pattern of Asian American Students in Postsecondary Education," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 2, 1985.

³ By the year 2000, scientists in Japan expect the realization of "technologies related to the production of physiologically active substances by the cellular cultivation process and artificial multiple fertilization of cows..., the application of artificial vaccines, anti-viral agents and antibiotic substances to medical treatment as well as to agriculture, forestry, and fisheries..., the introduction of intelligent robots at civil engineering and construction sites...." (see "Technology Development in Forecast up to 2010 in Japan," Science and Technology in Japan, April/June 1983, pp. 24-29.)

⁴ see "America looks to the Pacific: U.S. international trade most active with Asia," in Asian Week, September 28, 1984.

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